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ABSTRACT

The number of disadvantaged school leavers facing a shortage of chances to participate in society and work is growing. Austria, Germany, and Switzerland have different regulations regarding length of compulsory schooling. All three regard participation in apprenticeship as a kind of standard, and their governments direct strong efforts to bring in as many disadvantaged youth as possible. With regard to students who achieve weakly in compulsory schooling in Austria, all students at the lower type of secondary school leave after 8 years at age 14. They may change to a 1-year polytechnic program and, at age 15, pass into an apprenticeship program. In Switzerland, an optional year of practical learning is given at grade 10 (age 15). In Germany, part-time vocational schools offer a full-time year of preparation to find placement in the apprenticeship system in grade 11, at age 16. To provide information on available occupational opportunities, Austrian primary school provides textile and technical handicrafts; Switzerland and Germany provide handicrafts activities from grade 7. Germany makes many efforts to lead young people to apprenticeship training. Businesses have a free hand to take in apprentices; the federal government takes balancing measures when placements are in insufficient supply. Switzerland has a pre-apprenticeship, a short variant with less intellectual demands. Austria has a two-year pre-apprenticeship program designed to fulfill requirements of the first year of ordinary apprenticeship programs. (YLB)

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Disadvantaged school leavers at the threshold of school to Vocational Training Transition, or School to Work Transition - strategies in Austria, Switzerland and Germany

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The problem

The term of "disadvantaged school leavers " is used here with respect to the shortage of chances to participate in the society and to make use of opportunities. The term does not characterise young people themselves and does not refer to the abilities of people and to reasons for being disadvantaged. The term points at the necessity to give everybody chances of participation.

A basic and central element of participation is taking part in meaningful work processes and experiencing acknowledgement by being paid for one's own contribution. A prerequisite for this in many cases is a thorough vocational or technical training. Participation in vocational training programs is regarded necessary for benefiting from the chances given in society.

For a rather long time in history it has not been a public goal to enable everybody to participate on the base of individual abilities which would allow to make one's own living. In a more patriarchally organised society many people used to live in a dependent status, mostly on their parents or on a landlord. Today it is nearly a common persuasion that almost everybody should have an initial vocational, technical, academic or professional training to be able to make his or her own living. Even if somebody for some reason does not make profitable use of the professional qualifications in the life to come, receiving training and education is regarded to be advantageous.

Whereas forty years ago about 20 % of school leavers in Germany did not take the chance to have more training and education and instead contributed to their family's business or had jobs which did not require specific training, today most young people want to have training and education. State policy also tends at maximising the young population's inclusion into further training and education. Not all school leavers yet manage to take part in training schemes or to find work in a business firm. Even from those who take part in training schemes a certain percentage gives up and not all of those who graduate from a training program are successful in getting employment. It is these categories of young people who often are named disadvantaged youth. Not few of them completed the required years of general schooling but did not graduate from school, i.e. they did not receive the ordinary school leaving certificate. Some of them leave school not from the grade that matches their age group but from a lower grade because they repeated one or more years during their school career. Other young people who are covered by this term frequented a school for students with learning disabilities. They are regarded as disadvantaged with respect to their chances of participation even if they graduated from these schools with the ordinary certificate. Others are those who managed to graduate from the lowest type of general secondary school because also these school graduates have difficulties to transit to a training program or to work. Another group are those who were enrolled into a training program but gave up. And finally also those who completed a training program but were not able to go on into employment are counted among this category.

Those young people who are mentally handicapped are educated in special schools and receive a training in specific workshops for handicapped people where they shall get the opportunity to participate in a working process by producing goods for the market at so-called protected workplaces. Young people with other disabilities mostly can participate in regular training programs preferably in occupations where their disability is not interfering very much. In Germany there exists a list of occupations which are recommended for choice for handicapped people, in Austria and Switzerland there is not such a list. Often these training programs are full-time school programs

which include practical training and sometimes there exist special schools for these programs. The handicapped receive special aids. Disabled and handicapped young people are not counted among the category "disadvantaged youth".

As mentioned before, some decades ago there was not much concern about the work career of young people whom we now call disadvantaged. They were absorbed by a variety of work opportunities for untrained young people, e.g. in the case of young women in private households, in agricultural farms or in factories. One figure may illustrate the change that took place in the recent decades. In Switzerland, in the year 1973 not more than 81 persons (absolute figure!) were registered unemployed – this was a percentage of less than 0,1 % - and in 1997 it were 206.291 persons – which was a percentage of 5,7% (from all people being employed or seeking employment). (Gerhards, p 487)

It is said that in 1997 the quota of unemployed youth - this is the percentage of the age group beyond the age of compulsory schooling up to 24 years of age – was 11,0 % in Germany, 6,6 % in Austria, 4,7% in Switzerland. The diversity of the figures on this indicator is great in European countries: in Denmark the figure was 7,3 %, in the Netherlands 7,7%, in Italy 32,9 %, in Spain 37,6 %. (ibidem p 490) In Switzerland it was in the year 1992 when the youth unemployment rate first time surpassed the overall unemployment quota.

These figures demonstrate the relevance of the topic of disadvantaged youth. The growth of this group has several reasons. Besides changes in economy and technology also changes in the conditions of growing up for children and adolescents play a role. Individual factors contribute as well, yet an additional influential factor is the organisational structure of schooling and vocational training. Therefore it is of interest to study the strategies that governments apply to ease the problem although the governments are not the only actors in this scene.

The three countries which are being compared here differ with respect to their regulations about the years of compulsory schooling. Transition into an apprenticeship program is possible in Austria and Switzerland at earliest at the age of 15 – this means after 9 years of compulsory schooling. So is the regulation in several German states, others fixed the age of 16 as the starting line – this means after ten years of compulsory schooling. In all three countries taking part in the apprenticeship scheme is regarded as a kind of standard, therefore governments direct strong efforts towards the goal to bring as many disadvantaged young people into that scheme as possible.

Strategies

1.

With respect to students who achieve weakly in their career of compulsory schooling the question arises whether these should be given the chance to pass into a more practical type of learning early enough or whether they should follow the regular school program to the end even if they will have to spend additional time in school. Educators speak of a ceiling effect in the school career which some students experience at the age of 14 or 15. If this is correct it is unwise to force them to continue this type of learning which from then will result in frustration and failures. From a political viewpoint yet, the separation of students might look as an act of discrimination.

Some countries open a way out for this clientele at the age of 14 or 15 at latest. So does **Austria**. All Students at the lower type of secondary school (Hauptschule) which is separate from the more academic school type (Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule) leave this school after eight years of schooling at the age of 14. They may change into a one-year-program which is called polytechnic program (Polytechnische Schule). Here they enjoy many practical technical activities besides basic general subjects. They can find out which occupation is of interest for them among the occupations offered in the apprenticeship scheme and at the age of 15 they may pass into an apprenticeship program with a business firm. This is an option especially for weak learners because those students who achieved better in the lower secondary school (Hauptschule) prefer to spend their ninth year of schooling in a vocational full time school, mostly the advanced type (Berufsbildende Höhere Schule) in order to find out whether they have the ability to complete the full program. If they find themselves to be stretched too far they also may change into the apprenticeship scheme after the ninth year.

In **Switzerland** the option for a year of mainly practical learning is given at the level of the tenth grade which corresponds to the age of 15, that means one year after completion of the compulsory school program. This is an optional year for those who did not yet gain a contract for an apprenticeship or do not feel prepared enough for the vocational training scheme. Whereas in Switzerland this additional optional year is part of the lower secondary school, in **Germany** a similar option is located at the part-time vocational school. These schools offer a full-time year of preparation for finding a placement in the apprenticeship system for leavers from the lower secondary school. This specific year of schooling is open for graduates who earned the regular school leaving certificate or leavers (who in the German meaning of this word leave school without reaching this certificate). In some German states this is the eleventh year of schooling which students enter at the age of 16, in others it is the tenth year which usually starts when students are 15. In case students have repeated one or two years at the lower secondary school they are older. It is not only a marginal difference whether this year of practical learning is located at the general secondary school or at the vocational part-time school because workshops are needed for the program. The location at the general lower secondary school seems to be disadvantageous because this is more remote from vocational training, yet the existence of well equipped workshops in lower secondary schools is an advantage for this type of schools because the facilities can be used by young students as well and help them to direct their interests to practical activities. In Switzerland many schools start practical courses in their own workshops for the less achieving students from grade 7. (Ming p 570)

A short glance back to the German Democratic Republic shows that even their educational system which was named a unitary system held open a way out for weak learners. At the age of 14 they left school for vocational training in intellectually less demanding occupations.

2.

One reason for the difficulties of transition into vocational training programs and for transition from there to work is the lack of information on the side of the school students. They often make uninformed choices about the occupation which they want to be trained in. Inquiries among apprentices in Germany showed that the persons who had the strongest impact of the school leavers' decisions were their parents or close relatives. They were followed by the teachers and only then came the counsellors in the 'offices for employment and vocational counselling' which exist within the state centres for labour market policy. Many school leavers do not have a sufficient overview of

the opportunities that are available and don't know enough about future employment chances of the individual occupations. They sometimes have an illusionist idea of the occupations they choose and this is why not seldom apprenticeship contracts are solved after a while.

To be able to make a relatively stable decision about the occupation or profession a young person wants to work in later, does not only require knowledge about the accessible opportunities but also about oneself, i.e. the own interests, talents and abilities. Some school systems care for chances of self-experience by organising creative and practical activities and field experiences. Some educators believe that experiences of this kind must be made in one's early youth or even childhood because basic attitudes and inclinations are formed early in life. This is why the **Austrian** primary school in 1979 established the subjects Textile and Technical Handicrafts which are in common for girls and boys. They are continued up to grade 8. (Forstner p 121)

Handicrafts activities which also exist in **Switzerland** and **Germany** from grade 7 onwards primarily serve pedagogical intentions. The task of supporting the choice for an occupation or profession to be trained in needs further means. In all three countries the lower secondary schools arrange visits to business firms and field experiences in business firms or other institutions, mostly from grade 8 or 9 onwards which mostly take two weeks. In several German towns teachers and business firms established formal co-operation by meetings where teachers can learn about the opportunities that exist for their students and business men can learn about the background of students. When students made up their decision about an occupation the question is left whether a prospective business firm will take them in as apprentices. In Switzerland business firms invite students to spend some days with them during their holidays in order to come to know each other better (so-called *Schupperlehre*).

A critical question still is whether field experiences should also be organised for students at the academically oriented secondary schools. In Germany e.g. a growing portion of graduates from academically oriented upper secondary schools (*Gymnasium*) decide to start an apprenticeship training instead of entering a university, especially an apprenticeship program in banking institutions, in commerce and technologically advanced branches. In 1998 the percentage of upper secondary school graduates who opted for the apprenticeship scheme was 16 %. (Cf. Rothe 2001, p 452) Yet only few German states require field experiences from students in upper secondary schools, in most states this activity is voluntary.

Obviously the means of schools to support the choice are limited. More effectiveness can be expected from the provision of counselling which the state centres for labour market policy offer. They developed elaborated theoretical models of the process of choice and of the process of counselling. Their counsellors also deliver information in schools. Media and the WEB system get more and more importance and augment the information load which the school leavers must handle.

3.

Another question which arises with respect to the disadvantaged youth is whether a specific training scheme should be made available for them which is less demanding than the ordinary one or whether measures should be taken for lifting those young people up to the entrance level that is expected for the ordinary programs. From a pedagogical point of view this is a question about separation or integration in the sense of mainstreaming. From a viewpoint of power structure the question is who shall be in charge of a specific supply: the state or the business world.

In **Germany** many efforts are made to lead young people to the threshold of a regular apprenticeship training program even if this effort takes a rather long time. To a certain degree this is an outflow of the idea of equality of opportunities. A variety of measures and also of providers exist. The individual states which are obliged to maintain part-time vocational schools accompanying the business located training, offer one-year and two-year-programs of a full-time scale which shall bridge the gap between general secondary school and access to an apprenticeship training program. The fact that the part-time vocational schools for this purpose offer full-time programs demonstrates that the programs were borne in a situation of need. The one year programs are preparatory in character, the two year-year programs are designed to substitute the first year of an apprenticeship program, yet business owners who take in students as apprentices coming from this program, are free to recognise the program for the first year of their training scheme or not. This detail indicates a weakness of the apprenticeship model which enlarges the problem of disadvantaged youth. The states don't have the capacity to influence the behaviour of the businesses and also not of their self-governing bodies. The states' competencies are restricted to supplying of schooling – this means general schooling and part-time vocational schooling - although schooling and practical training in the businesses should go hand in hand. Above this the full-time programs in vocational part-time schools don't have the volume to care for many of the disadvantaged youth.

As the businesses have a free hand to take in apprentices or not the federal government takes balancing measures in times of insufficient supply of placements. The federal government in Germany regards the problem of disadvantaged youth as a matter of labour policy, not of educational policy for which the federal government has no competencies. Measures which shall strengthen the will and the ability of young people to enter a vocational training program or immediately the job market are regarded as means for activating the labour market. Therefore the federal authority for labour market policy finances these measures which are administered by private non-profit agencies. The measures mostly take one year, sometimes also two years and comprise practical training in workshops, some instruction in basic subjects and psychological support by social workers. The non-profit agencies maintain the premises and facilities and employ the teachers and social workers. They also offer programs of re-training for unemployed adults. They even run supportive courses for those disadvantaged young people who succeeded in getting an apprenticeship contract with a business firm yet are in danger of giving up. The more unemployment grew in Germany the bigger became the sector of non-profit agencies who get paid for nearly all their programs and courses by the federal authority for labour market policy.

Agencies of this type which often do a committed work mushroomed especially in the former East Germany (German Democratic Republic). Although some of them would be able to build up the capacity for providing full apprenticeship programs they are not allowed to invade this sector because the delivery of apprenticeship programs is reserved to the business world and only the self-governing bodies of the business world (chambers of industry and commerce and chambers of the crafts) are in the position to award state recognised certificates for graduates from the apprenticeship programs. Certificates which are not recognised by the chambers are of little value. The privileged position of the apprenticeship model is guarded by the organisations of employers and by the labour unions as well. The certificate of graduating from an apprenticeship program is a cornerstone in the whole structure of wages and salaries.

When disadvantaged youth take part in such preparatory courses with non-profit agencies they earn a claim to receive unemployment subsidies after completing the program in case they fail in entering the labour market. The federal labour market authority regards their taking part in such programs as equalising a job activity which entitles employees for receiving unemployment benefit when they loose their job.

It is true that a small segment of two-years-apprenticeship programs exist in Germany which lead to a less valuable certificate than the full apprenticeship programs do: the certificate of a worker (*Werker*). The widening of this model might seem to be a chance for the clientele of disadvantaged youth, however they only are a residuum from the times before the new legislation in 1969 and must not be increased. Neither the self-governing bodies of the business world nor the unions are inclined to expand this small sector.

A large world of programs and courses was created in Germany which shall cope with a problem of great pedagogical relevance. It is steered not by educational authorities but by labour market laws. The federal government spends an extreme amount of money year by year for preparatory programs with non-profit agencies but does not build up public capacities for vocational education itself. A great number of youth is waiting at the threshold of vocational training, is cared for by state subsidised programs but does not earn a certificate which would have some value in the world of business. Not few people for several years live a patchwork career composed of such measures alternating with phases of receiving unemployment benefits.

Yet, the way these additional measures are administered reveals the dilemma of the political structure of the apprenticeship scheme in the German variant. The responsibility of the states is limited to supply schools: general schools and part-time vocational schools. The federal government lacks the capacity to build up an alternative to the apprenticeship scheme which is under the rule of the self-governing bodies of industry and commerce and accordingly the crafts in co-operation with the labour unions. The businesses finance the vocational training which takes place in their premises and in return enjoy a guarantee of non-intervention from the federal state. From the state's side this policy was meant to keep its own costs low but meanwhile it costs more than investments into public provisions for vocational education would cost. Yet, even if the federal state would be allowed by the world of business to establish public provisions within the realm of occupations which are controlled by the chambers it were the individual states which would challenge the federal state's right to act this way and by this breaking their sovereignty over the sphere of schools. The individual states lack the financial power to establish state owned full-time vocational schools in the sphere of occupations which is ruled by the world of business together with the unions. The states' sovereignty over the sphere of schools nevertheless has already been broken by the world of business – employers and unions - in co-operation with the federal government. They stripped the states from the influence on the curricula of vocational education although the part-time vocational schools which are ruled and financed by the states must provide for the theoretical vocational subjects. These curricula are devised at the federal level in co-operation of representatives of the self-governing bodies of the businesses, of representatives of the unions and of the federal government.

The scenery is somewhat different in Austria and Switzerland. In **Switzerland** too there exists a sector of measures which are financed by the federal authority for labour market policy. An example is the so-called semester of motivation for 15 to 18 years olds. It takes roughly four months and is designed to support school leavers with their personal decision making. For people who graduated from an apprenticeship program and nevertheless could not find employment, so called

practicum experiences of three months' duration are financed. This gives the participants a better position for applications with business firms. They need not apply with a business firm from a position of unemployment. This scheme is available up to the age of 30. (Gerhards p 490)

Of greater importance is a so-called pre-apprenticeship (*Anlehre*) which is a short variant of an apprenticeship program and has less intellectual demands. Mostly these training programs have a duration of two years. For this scheme the part-time schools which have to accompany the business-based practical training program also lower their curricular requirements and form specific groups out of these students to secure individual support. The graduates receive a recognised certificate which yet does not equalise the regular certificate of apprenticeship graduates. The creation of this variant came about as a conclusion from the recognition that about 5 – 8 % of the young population is not able to fulfil the requirements of a full-scale apprenticeship program. (Ming p 567)

The initiative for the *Anlehre* started in the seventieth of the 20th century among teachers at schools for students with learning disabilities in the town of Zurich. It was heavily contested then because opponents criticised separation as a means of discrimination. Also the unions opposed it, because they suspected lowering of standards and wages, but a public referendum overcame the resistance. The instrument of referendum which is a vote of the whole electorate is often applied in Switzerland to dissolve situations of political blockade. The world of business accepted this diminutive form of apprenticeship programs because especially small businesses are interested to make use of these young people. Obviously the majority of these apprentices is successful in getting employment after graduation.

The success of this model illustrates the power balance in the Swiss vocational training system. The self-governing bodies of industry, commerce and the crafts (*Berufsverbände* and chambers) are not centralised as is the case especially in Austria and to a less degree in Germany. This is due to the fact that the federal state did not privilege these organs by specific legislation at the expense of the freedom of trade. Therefore in Switzerland a variety of self-governing bodies exists which are partly restrained to economic branches and partly to the individual states (*Kantone*) and are only loosely overarched by national representations. Therefore the interests of small businesses are not easily pushed back by bigger corporations. In compensation for not privileging these organs so much as their German speaking neighbour states did the Swiss federal state subsidises these organisations financially which lends the state more influence upon them than is the case in Germany.

The growth of this model creates problems nevertheless. As Switzerland has allowed many foreigners with different mother tongues to live in the country the portion of foreign apprentices is rather high in this type of pre-apprenticeship (Anlehre). Even though the model is helpful for those who benefit from it, the social problem to which it responds cannot be solved fully.

In comparison to the German variant of a shortened apprenticeship scheme for the level of a worker (*Werker*) the appropriate Swiss model (*Anlehre*) was consciously constructed after the social problem became evident whereas the German variant is a residuum from a former state of legislation and has no prospect for expansion.

In **Austria** the problem of students not seeking any vocational education after completion of the lower secondary school seemed to be settled in the eighties of the 20th century because the fast growing full-time vocational schools fulfilled the role of a second pillar and took in those who sought an alternative to the apprenticeship system. In the nineties however the figure of so-called

drop outs rose again – up to 10% of the age group. (Plank p 473) The reasons for this phenomenon are not yet clear. Perhaps meanwhile the full-time vocational schools proved to be too demanding for this segment of youth.

Austria as well applied the means of specific programs delivered by non-profit agencies and subsidised by the federal labour market policy. In 1999 Austria started a new model for the clientele of disadvantaged youth. This is a pre-apprenticeship program as in Switzerland but the name and the contents are different (*Vorlehre*). It takes two years but is designed only to fulfil the requirements of the first year of the ordinary apprenticeship programs. It is hoped that these two years will stabilise the learning behaviour so far that the apprentice can pursue the following two years of the program. The fact that the apprentice receives a contract for the whole program in the beginning shall strengthen the motivation. This is different from the German two-years' program of preparation which is administered by part-time vocational schools at a full-time scale, because in Germany the participants cannot be sure to receive an apprenticeship contract from a business. The coming into existence of this model in Austria demonstrates the relatively strong position of the federal government in the power game with the self-governing bodies of industry and the crafts and with the unions.

The differences between the three countries with respect to the duration of schooling and the speed of transition into vocational training programs (apprenticeships and full-time vocational schools) result in differences in the age structure of those who take part in training programs.

From the age group of the **16 years olds** were enrolled in vocational training programs in the year 1998:		
Germany	Austria	Switzerland
13,6 %	70,7 %	34,2 %
From the age group of the **17 years olds** were enrolled in vocational training programs in the year 1998:		
Germany	Austria	Switzerland
37,0%	68,7%	54,1%
From the age group of the **18 years olds** were enrolled in vocational training programs in the year 1998:		
Germany	Austria	Switzerland
43,3%	51,8%	55,2%
From the age group of **the 20 years olds** were enrolled in vocational training programs in the year 1998:		
Germany	Austria	Switzerland
28,7%	15,0%	18,0%

(Source: Rothe 2001 p 418)

The table shows that the entrance into vocational training programs (apprenticeships and full-time vocational schools) are earliest in Austria, latest in Germany with Switzerland in between.

Conclusion

There is no ideal system of vocational training. There is no ideal pedagogy at all. The problem of disadvantaged youth has so many facets that it cannot be solved completely. We can learn from actions taken in other countries. Every action yet is embedded in a political and administrative structure which is the most difficult to change. The apprenticeship scheme is an extremely complex structure. The degree to which each country can solve or at least alleviate the problem above all depends on the quality of this structure, its balance and flexibility, its potential for response to uprising problems and its capacity of decision making.

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